

pray and hope and long for the day when the splendid Christian manhood, and I say this without any reservation, the splendid Christian manhood and womanhood of the splendid South, the splendid enthusiasm and devotion to Jesus Christ, shall put itself behind this work for the Negro.

**"Use the Best Means We Have"**

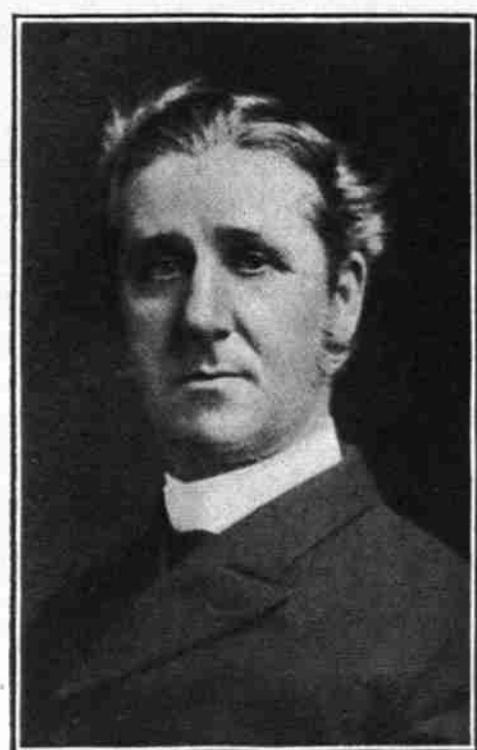
Meanwhile we have got to use the best means that we have. But many of these schools are anomalous institutions. For the most part their teachers are white people coming from distant sections of the country to spend a few months in the work among the black people, and when school closes they pack their trunks and spend their vacations in the North. They do not come into contact with the white people of the South. And they are educating these people to spend their lives among these southern

## **Present Needs of the Negro**

**Rev. Wilbur P. Thirkield, D.D.**

President Howard University, Washington, D. C.  
At Clifton Conference, August 19, 1908

I AM convinced of the possible far-reaching influence of this Conference on the moral and religious education of the people whom we would serve. Our hope is in this; that we meet under the cross of Christ, which is the touchstone of human sympathy; in the name of Jesus, who is the center and inspira-



President W. P. Thirkield

tion of all genuine brotherhood. We must bring to bear upon this problem the forces of religion and education. The permanent solvent is to be found in the teaching of the Ten Commandments and in the principles of the Sermon on the Mount.

We are here in this Conference in the order of God's providence. The same providence that has brought the Negroes out of the jungles of Africa overruled, in their education and enlightenment, their slavery among Protestant people, and that in freedom has thrown about them the greatest educational and religious forces ever vouchsafed to any destitute

white people whom they, their teachers, do not know. How can we permanently settle this matter in this way?

Now, do not mistake me. I honor the New England school-ma'am, and we all know that if it were not for the teachers who followed the army into the South, the lot of the Negroes would have been very different from what it has been. Those teachers did not begin at the top; they began at the bottom; and these institutions with their higher courses and such a group of Negro leaders as is present in this Conference are possible because they trained up men and women who were able to do this work. But it will be a great day when southern men and women of culture and education can be found, as a few are now found, who will put their hearts and lives into this work. And when the southern people do put their hands and hearts and sympathy to this work we are going to see something done.

people. And never in the history of the world has any race made such progress in the same length of time as has the Negro.

### **Educative Influences in the School of Slavery**

Grateful recognition has here been made of the educative influences, even in the hard school of slavery. Here the Negro got, first, ideas of law and order. There are two kinds of freedom, liberty to do what a man likes and liberty to do what a man ought. The Negro gave ready response to law; and the spirit of restraint and obedience to law under freedom suddenly thrust upon them is without a parallel.

As we are planning for schools that shall make for the higher life of the Negro, let me emphasize what I have been proclaiming for a quarter of a century, since I began my work in Georgia, that the best work of our schools and churches has been opposed by schools of crime in the convict lease system of the several states. Young lawbreakers have been chained to hardened criminals. Their bodies and souls have been sold to the highest bidder.

### **Old and Young have been Dehumanized**

The reformatory element has not entered these prisons. Old and young have been brutalized, yea, dehumanized under this system. The recent revelations in Georgia have been paralleled by the outcome of former investigations. The convict lease system has been a fruitful school of crime. What wonder is it that moral monsters have escaped from these camps! Let us